

# PUBLIC HEALTH REPORT

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SINCE 1855, when the California Legislature passed a "Poor Law" which delegated responsibility for the needy sick to the county boards of supervisors, indigent mothers and children have been hospitalized in county hospitals.

In modern times the pressure of increased population, coupled with technological advances in medicine, has brought about the replacement of some of the older institutions by modern well-equipped institutions. Such progress, however, has been far from uniform. While some county hospitals today provide a high level of care, others do not meet minimal accepted standards of modern medical care.

Medical societies, county boards of supervisors and official health agencies, influenced by a growing conviction that regional planning of hospitals is essential, are approaching a consensus that in order to give all citizens access to high quality of medical services there must be a reappraisal of the tradition of segregating patients according to their ability to pay.

Thus, there is increasing attention being given to the concept of planning community health facilities to meet the needs of all citizens and a conviction that adequate hospital planning must be directed to serve the community as an integral whole.

In 1961, the Legislature instructed the State Department of Public Health to collect and analyze data necessary for the development of standards in governmental health services.

As a step in fulfilling this charge, the department is carrying out a study of all tax-supported medical care for children. Because of concern with unusually high maternal and infant death rates among county hospital patients, initial attention was given to maternity and pediatric services in these hospitals.

Guided by objectives, forms and methods which had been developed in cooperation with the California Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the department undertook a survey of all county hospitals in California during 1962-63. A task force consisting of physicians and other health professionals visited each county hospital to evaluate pediatric and maternity services.

The department's Advisory Committee on Public Medical Care for Children, in reviewing the details of the task force report, has concluded that the present county hospital system is out of step with changing social circumstances and attitudes. Although the report focuses on pediatric and obstetric care, the committee believes that the basic problems are reflected in the medical care of other county hospital patients as well.

In particular, the committee feels the segregation of hospital care of needy patients contributes to the fragmentation of their care, impedes the ability of private medical practitioners to participate more effectively in the care of the needy and interferes with the rational development of community hospital facilities.

In summary, the committee said that segregated county hospitals which serve only the recipient of tax-supported medical care are not providing the quality, scope and flexibility of service possible with integrated community hospitals. It believes that county and voluntary hospital services should become integrated community programs serving the community at large without regard to the patient's ability to pay.

Copies of the full committee report, including its recommendations, have been sent to county medical societies and hospital administrators. Additional copies can be obtained through request to the State Department of Public Health, 2151 Berkeley Way, Berkeley.

It is estimated that some 383,000 births occurred in California during 1964, about 3,000 more than in 1963. However, the birth rate—the number of births per 1,000 population—is estimated to be 21.0 in 1964 as compared with 21.5 the preceding year. The birth rate has thus continued on a downward trend which began in the late months of 1961—a trend which is nationwide.

It is estimated that about 153,000 deaths occurred in California last year, as compared with about 148,000 in 1963. The death rate of 8.4 per 1,000 population was the same as the previous year.